



The Amateur in You

What have you been pondering?



The bands are dead

Once in awhile, I dust off my HF rig, fire it up on 20 meters, spin the dial, and hear nothing but noise. Sometimes I learn that others experience the same on 40, on 10, and on 15 meters. Finally, out of frustration yet another says, *The bands are dead!* Then it dawns on me...exactly what does he mean by that?

Is he referring to the fact that he's unable to hear any other stations on SSB? Or does he mean that others are unable to hear *him* when he calls out? And are these due to some sort of equipment (antenna, tuner, amplifier) malfunction? Or is there something wrong with the ionosphere?

After hearing this phrase for years, I've come to the conclusion that it means *My three favorite bands seem unusable to me!* Assuming the ham knows how to work his equipment and that his equipment is in good working order, my remaining conclusion is that *he's attempting to use it at the wrong time.*

So, when's the *right* time? Here are some general guidelines that might help (60 meters intentionally omitted):

160 meters

DX night

Susceptible to static from thunderstorms and light switches, especially during summer months

80 meters, 40 meters

DX night, local day

Susceptible to static from thunderstorms, LEDs, and digital equipment, especially during summer months

30 meters, 20 meters, 17 meters

DX day and night during sunspot highs

Local is difficult any time, but perhaps the

most populated bands for digital (30 meters) and SSB (20 meters) during a sunspot high, when you can enjoy hamming around the clock.

15 meters, 12 meters, 10 meters

DX day and local day during sunspot highs

Probably the most fun bands during the sunspot cycle highs, because you can effortlessly snag DX contacts with only 20 watts. During sunspot lows, contacts could still be made using gray-line. Listen for beacons near 28.200 MHz to know of band openings.

6 meters

DX and local during sunspot highs

They don't call this the *magic band* for nothing. Works best during heavy sunspot activity, but can also come alive without warning, then fade away just as quickly, for no apparent reason. Best band for working Sporadic-E, peaking around June and December.

2 meters

SSB local during sunspot highs

FM local or repeaters

Signals in this band can be detected hundreds or even thousands of miles away by tropospheric ducting (inversion) when it's cold or during heavy sunspot activity.

1.25 meters, 70 cm

FM local or repeaters

It's quite rare for signals of these frequencies to be heard very far without help. The only time I've heard of them getting far is during a freak event, such as a solar flare or CME (coronal mass ejection).

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